

Enhancing your Education: Becoming a Strong Candidate for Fellowships

Seek undergraduate experiences that stimulate your personal, intellectual, and professional growth. You become a strong fellowship candidate by getting involved in activities, projects, and studies that reflect what is important to you and are beneficial to society, not by engaging in activities simply to build your resume. These fellowships can be used to attend graduate school, to study abroad, or to conduct research; however, the funding is a way to help you achieve your goals, not the goal itself. Following the suggestions below will enhance your educational experience and better prepare you for life. In the process, you will also become a stronger candidate for national fellowships.

- Strive for excellence in challenging classes. Good grades are a prerequisite for fellowship success, but the best students seek more than the grade. Train yourself to learn outside the parameters of the classroom. Take challenging and diverse courses outside your major.
- Work on your communication skills. Many fellowships require essays and interviews. Take additional writing intensive courses and courses that require public speaking.
- Gain experience. Fellowship boards want to know that you not only have an interest, but that you are doing something about it. Intern, work, or volunteer to gain experience in your field. Start looking for such experiences now. Use every summer productively.
- Make time for public service and volunteerism in areas that you care about. One good way to do this while earning credit is to participate in service-learning courses.
- Expand your knowledge of the world. Enrich your perspectives on people, places and events by following the news and reading books, by undertaking travel and study abroad, by participating in intercultural events and attending lectures to hear fresh viewpoints, etc. Get involved and become an active participant in interesting extracurricular activities that are meaningful to you. Seek out leadership opportunities. Make things happen! Start your own organization if you see an unmet need.
- Seek the opportunity to do undergraduate research in your field. This may take different forms with different majors, but it will help you prepare for your academic future and complement your classroom experience.
- Take the initiative in obtaining mentors. Engage your professors, advisors, administrators and employers in conversation; ask for help. You can learn from them, and they will get to know you well enough to provide a letter of recommendation.
- Start assessing and reflecting upon your credentials and goals. This will help you clarify your direction in life and reveal what steps you should follow to reach those goals. It will also help you determine which fellowships best fit your goals. Also consider what you are passionate about. Thinking ahead will make it easier for you to prepare your personal statements and applications when the time comes to do so.
- If you find a fellowship that looks right for you, don't hesitate—apply. MU students have been successful in the past in obtaining these coveted awards. Also, the process itself is highly rewarding because it allows you to develop and refine skills, such as writing personal statements and interviewing, that will be useful later in life.